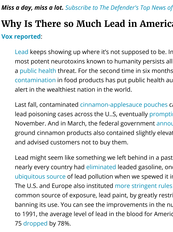
04/03/24 BIG FOOD

Why Is There so Much Lead in American Food? + More

The Defender's Big Food NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to industrial food companies and their products, including ultra-processed foods, food additives, contaminants, GMOs and lab-grown meat and their toxic effects on human health. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff



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Why Is There so Much Lead in American Food?

Vox reported:

Lead keeps showing up where it's not supposed to be. In 2024, one of the most potent neurotoxins known to humanity persists all over the world as a public health threat. For the second time in six months, lead contamination in food products has put public health authorities on high alert in the wealthiest nation in the world.

Last fall, contaminated cinnamon-applesauce pouches caused dozens of lead poisoning cases across the U..S, eventually prompting recalls in November. And in March, the federal government announced that some ground cinnamon products also contained slightly elevated levels of lead and advised customers not to buy them.

Lead might seem like something we left behind in a past era. By the 1990s, nearly every country had eliminated leaded gasoline, once easily the most ubiquitous source of lead pollution when we spewed it into the open air. The U.S. and Europe also instituted more stringent rules for another common source of exposure, lead paint, by greatly restricting or outright banning its use. You can see the improvements in the numbers: From 1978 to 1991, the average level of lead in the blood for Americans younger than 75 dropped by 78%.

But lead usage has actually been on the rise worldwide, even in the U.S. The proliferation of lead-acid batteries globally and less stringent rules in the developing world for everything from cookware to spices has allowed lead consumption to grow despite its known health risks.

As Obesity Rises, Big Food and Dietitians Push 'Anti-Diet' Advice

The Washington Post reported:

One company in particular, General Mills, maker of Cocoa Puffs and Lucky Charms cereals, has launched a multi-pronged campaign that capitalizes on the teachings of the anti-diet movement, an investigation by The Washington Post and The Examination, a nonprofit newsroom that covers global public health, has found.

General Mills has toured the country touting anti-diet research it claims proves the harms of "food shaming." It has showered giveaways on registered dietitians who promote its cereals online with the hashtag #DeralTheShame, and sponsored influencers who promote its sugary snacks. The company has also enlisted a team of lobbyists and pushed back against federal policies that would add health information to food labels.

The majority of the influencers who used anti-diet language also were paid to promote products from food, beverage and supplement companies, the analysis found.

Since the 1980s, the U.S. obesity rate has more than doubled, according to federal data. Nearly half a million Americans die early each year as a result of excess body weight, according to estimates in a 2022 Lancet study.

The anti-diet approach essentially shifts accountability for the health crisis away from the food industry for creating ultra-processed junk foods laden with food additives, sugars and artificial sweeteners.

Bill to Shield Bayer, Pesticide Makers From Warning Label Lawsuits Advances in Iowa

Des Moines Register reported:

Pesticide manufacturers would be protected from lawsuits stemming from their products' labeling under a bill advancing through the Iowa Legislature.

Legislation approved by the Senate Tuesday and under consideration in the House would permit a pesticide label to have "sufficient warning" so long as it complies with federal regulations.

The bill, backed by Bayer, aims to protect the company and others like it from lawsuits accusing their products of not adequately warning of potential health issues, including cancer.

Officials from Bayer argue that the company's labels comply with Environmental Protection Agency regulations. That includes their subsidiary Monsanto's Roundup, a weed killer produced in Muscatine that was the subject of thousands of lawsuits claiming it caused cancer and led to an $11 billion settlement in 2020.

Despite Recent Headlines, Urban Farming Is Not a Climate Villain

Civil Eats reported:

At the end of January, multiple publications including Modern Farmer and Bloomberg ran eye-catching stories on the results of a research study published in Nature. Forbes declared that "Urban Farming Has a Shockingly High Climate Cost," a headline that was outright wrong based on the study's findings. Earth.com led with a single, out-of-context data point: "Urban agriculture's carbon footprint is 6x greater than normal farms."

On Instagram, urban farmers and gardeners began to express anger and frustration. Some commented on media company posts; others posted their own critiques. In February, students at the University of Michigan, where the study was conducted, organized a letter to the researchers pointing out issues with the study.

The issue most cited across critiques was simple: When urban farms were separated from community gardens in the study, the higher rate of greenhouse gas emissions reported essentially disappeared.

Now, two months later, national advocates for the multi-faceted benefits of growing food and green spaces in cities are working to counter what they see as harmful narratives created by a study they say had design flaws to begin with and was then poorly communicated to the public. Of special concern is funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) fledgling Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, which Congress has been shorting since it was established. A coalition of groups has been pushing to change that in the upcoming farm bill.

Europe's Restless Farmers Are Forcing Policymakers to Act

Reuters reported:

European policymakers have scaled back rules to protect nature, drawn up limits on the import of tariff-free Ukrainian grains and scrapped new legislation limiting pesticide use as farmers' protests resonate with voters ahead of elections.

From Poland to Portugal, farmers have won remarkable concessions in response to waves of street action, reshaping the European Union's green politics months ahead of European Parliament elections.

Farmers again blockaded streets surrounding the European Union headquarters in Brussels last week, spraying manure to protest low incomes, cheap food imports and burdensome red tape. As they did so, the bloc's farming ministers backed a new set of changes to weaken green rules linked to the disbursement of tens of billions of euros in farming subsidies.

"The elections in 2024 will be elections in the year of angry farmers," said Franc Bogovic, a Slovenian lawmaker in the European Parliament and himself a farmer. The scramble to placate farmers has impacted key pillars of EU policy, pressuring the bloc over its Green Deal and free trade accords.

Kraft Heinz, NotCo Targeting Deeper Presence in Plant-Based Foods, Exec Says

Food Dive reported:

Kraft Heinz and NotCo, its partner in the plant-based space, are not planning to slow the rollout of new products in the category even as some of its competitors scale back their once lofty ambitions.

Lucho Lopez-May, the CEO of The Kraft Heinz Not Company said The Kraft Heinz Not Company joint venture possesses two valuable attributes that provide it with multiple growth opportunities and separate it from its competitors. The first is the valuable brand equity that Kraft Heinz contributes, with several products in its portfolio that have been in home kitchens for decades.

NotCo, which is based in Chile, also contributes a powerful artificial intelligence platform to redesign traditional food products with plant-based ingredients. The technology allows The Kraft Heinz Not Company to replicate dairy, egg and meat offering with a plant-based substitute closer to the real thing, increasing the likelihood that the product will resonate with consumers.

Since establishing their partnership in 2022, Kraft Heinz and NotCo have introduced products that fit into each category: sliced cheese and Mac & Cheese for dairy, mayonnaise for egg and most recently, Oscar Mayer hot dogs and sausages, for meat.

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Share Best Newest Oldest

GB 21 days ago

Two or three years ago the push for 'body positivity' ('it's beautiful to be fat') kicked into high gear — nice lead-in to the release of all the weight-loss drugs now soaring in the stock market.

Reply

Peter van der Stam 21 days ago

Of course there HAVE to be lead in our food.
So we have to pay more. Lead is very heavy and and the (wet) battery recycling industry have to get rid of the the stuff.
Remarcable it is not yet put into the drinking water like Fluoride offal ??

Reply

Rob DF 21 days ago

"...another common source of exposure, lead paint," Please note that in order to be exposed to lead from lead paint you have to EAT the paint. I don't know who you hang out with but I personally don't know anyone who eats paint... It's fine that we eliminated lead paint but that it affected in any meaningful way levels of lead in humans is ridiculous.

Reply

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